

*House Monday joins Senate in approving compact, president expected to sign*

Washington, DC - Legislation to approve an international compact allowing first responders to cross the U.S.-Canada border and provide mutual assistance more effectively in times of emergency or national disaster crossed the final hurdle on its way to the President's desk for signature Monday when the U.S. House of Representatives unanimously agreed to pass the measure. Vermont's senior senator, Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.), first introduced the legislation to enact the International Emergency Management Assistance Memorandum of Understanding (IEMAMOU), and it was passed by the Senate in October. Rep. Peter Welch (D-Vt.) led efforts in the House to swiftly pass the same resolution before Congress's December recess.

Leahy in September shepherded the legislation through the Senate Judiciary Committee, which he chairs, securing the bipartisan support of all 11 other New England senators for the legislation. The Senate unanimously passed it in October. Welch introduced a companion bill in October, secured co-sponsorships from every House member of the New England delegation, and worked to expedite consideration of the Senate bill in the House. Leahy was first asked to bring the measure to the Senate in a letter from Vermont Governor Jim Douglas (R). Efforts by other New England senators, including those from New Hampshire and Maine, were stymied in previous, Republican-led Congresses. Leahy and Welch, as well as Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.), who co-sponsored the resolution, worked to make this year's efforts successful.

"By passing this resolution, the Vermont Delegation has been able to achieve what has been blocked in recent Congresses," said Leahy. "Severe storms and natural disasters hit communities on both sides of the border. Many neighbors along our friendly border with Canada share the burden of these natural disasters. By passing this bipartisan resolution, we reduce the bureaucracy that delays crucial aid during these times of emergency. We are in the throes of the winter season, and I hope the President signs this compact as soon as possible."

"This compact is a common sense step to help our first responders join forces for better community protection," said Welch. "Our northern-most communities share a local need to effectively respond to emergencies on either side of the border. I am pleased Congress has recognized this and that our delegation continues our successful cooperation to deliver the results Vermonters need and expect."

The IEMAMOU would reduce delays that hamper the distribution of aid in times of emergency between Northeast states and Canadian provinces by providing legal structure to international mutual aid between the two nations. It was adopted by the New England Governors Conference and the Eastern Canadian Premiers in 2000. The Senate resolution grants the consent of Congress to the IEMAMOU to allow emergency responders from both the United States and Canada to provide assistance on both sides of the border during natural disasters and other emergencies. The compact addresses issues including liability and payment before emergencies happen, enabling first responders to act without delay at critical times.

The Compact includes Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island and Connecticut, and the Provinces of Quebec, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Labrador.